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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S NOVEMBER 16 MEETING WITH MINISTER OF
INTERIOR

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4(b)and(d)

Summary

11. (C) On November 16, Ambassador had a very constructive first meeting with Minister of the Interior Anibal Fernandez. They discussed the excellent working relations between Embassy agencies and the four federal law enforcement agencies under the Minister's control. The Minister explained his efforts to bring the previously disjointed federal law enforcement agencies under his direction and stressed that he was the point of access to these agencies for the Embassy. He discussed MoI's efforts to develop a new, biometric national ID card, cooperation on airport security, and growing concerns about narcotics use in Argentina. The Ambassador asked the Minister about the Megaports Initiative, and it appears that Customs will likely have lead jurisdiction for the GoA. The Ambassador reiterated the importance of the AMIA report and arrest warrants in the war on terror and pledged continued USG support and assistance. The Minister stressed his commitment to fighting terror and his enthusiasm for U.S. equipment and technology. End Summary.

Fernandez in Charge

12. (C) On November 16, the Ambassador, accompanied by LegAtt, ICE Attache, RSO and PolOff, called on Minister of Interior Anibal Fernandez. The Minister did not have anyone else in the meeting. The tone of the meeting was very positive with the Minister noting the excellent working relationship the MoI enjoys with Embassy agencies. In the last several months, Fernandez has centralized all decision making regarding training invitations and invitations to seminars under his personal oversight. He explained that he had worked hard to bring the Federal Police (AFP), the Gendarmeria (GN), Prefectura Naval (PN) and Airport Security Police (PSA) under his coordinated leadership. He went on to say that he was in agreement with Embassy agencies on 98 percent of the personnel recommended for training but that he needed this degree of oversight in order to direct and designate appropriately. The Ambassador agreed that promoting coordination among law enforcement agencies was essential and noted the makeup of the USG personnel at the meeting as an example of Embassy efforts. The Minister said he appreciated the broad range of cooperation with the USG and pledged to work closely and smoothly with the Embassy.

National ID

13. (C) Fernandez explained to the Ambassador his plans for developing a new biometric national ID card that would be fraud resistant and could serve as ID, voting card, and immigration document. He noted that former President Menem in the '90s had initiated a similar project with the Siemens company, but that it was never effectively implemented. Fernandez explained that during Menem's administration, many U.S. companies didn't compete in government contracts because they didn't pay the "commissions" required, i.e. bribes demanded by officials to consider their bids. The Minister stressed that things had changed noting that several U.S. companies had won bids recently, citing Motorola's contract to provide communications equipment to the AFT. The Ambassador stated that the U.S. was ready to help and very interested in the ID project. The Ambassador noted that U.S. companies are interested in investing in Argentina and bidding on contracts and that competition and transparency were essential. Fernandez said that the new ID project would not be launched until after the national elections in October 2007.

Airport Security

14. (SBU) The Ambassador told the Minister that U.S. was also very interested in cooperating with the GoA on improving airport and transportation security and noting the pending TSA aviation security inspection (likely in February). The

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Ambassador told the Minister that the TSA Attache would like to work in partnership with the PSA in conducting a pre-assessment to prepare and assist them in meeting the minimum ICAO standards. Fernandez agreed and asked that the

TSA Attache meet with him to discuss the inspection and

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preparation work. He also asked to be informed in writing prior to the actual inspection.

Megaports

15. (C) The Ambassador asked Fernandez what internal decision the government had taken in regards to the stalled Megaports Initiative. (Note: The GoA had expressed strong interest early in the year in participating in the Initiative and hosted an April visit of a DoE-led team to conduct a technical site survey and continue discussions on a proposed MOU regarding implementation of the Megaports Initiative. Both the Argentine Coast Guard (Prefectura) and Customs Agency wanted to be the lead operational Agency for the Megaports Initiative. The Embassy has expressed no preference and the MFA was coordinating the MOU and initial implementation but has made no progress on coming to a final decision on which agency will lead. End Note). Fernandez indicated that the Prefectura would not be working together with Customs on the initiative. He said that the MoI was focusing on purchasing some mobile scanners for use by the AFP, Prefectura and Gendarmeria in detecting narcotics and other contraband. Embassy will follow up the MFA and Customs regarding the latest status of Megaports.

Counternarcotics

16. (U) The Minister noted the close and productive relationship the AFP and Gendarmeria had with the Embassy's DEA office. He said that increases of arrests and seizures between 2004 and 2005 were up around 15 percent, but that between 2005 and 2006 the increase was more like 300 percent.

This he said was due in large part to the coordinated approach he was stressing amongst law enforcement agencies, as well as the creation of special narcotics prosecuting units in each of the country's provinces. These units, he explained, had greatly increased communications between prosecutors and police, and between the various provincial

and federal agencies. He said they were having a positive effect with the population as well as more regular citizens were coming forward unsolicited to provide valuable information to law enforcement.

¶7. (SBU) Fernandez said he was very concerned about increased drug use in Argentina, particularly the spread in the use of "Paco" in the greater Buenos Aires area. Paco is a very cheap, crude, low-quality form of cocaine base, normally smoked. It is reportedly very addictive with serious health effects. The Minister noted that nobody would pay for the freight of such "trash," indicating that it was being produced in the burgeoning local "kitchens" in Buenos Aires' suburban slums. He also expressed his insistence on receiving real and valuable information regarding trafficking and drug seizures. He said he wanted his agencies to tell him not just how much narcotic was being seized but also the quality and its origin.

AMIA Terrorist Bombing

¶8. (C) LegAtt informed the Minister that, as of September, the USG was a member of Interpol's Executive Committee and would be ready to vigorously defend the Red Notices for capture ordered by Investigating Judge Canicoba Corral. Fernandez said that he has strongly supported the Kirchner Administration's efforts to move this case forward. He said he had met frequently with families of the victims and representatives of both the Argentine and U.S. Jewish communities. He explained that it had been difficult for the GoA to strongly defend the Red Notices issued by the original investigating judge Galeano due to the charges of malfeasance against him and his eventual impeachment. The current investigation, report and indictments are different, however, and Fernandez said the government would be able to strongly support them.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador said that the USG appreciated the political will the President and the GoA have shown and that the USG will continue to do all it can to support Argentina, with the GoA in the lead. Fernandez related that upon taking office in 2003, President Kirchner said -- in reference to

AMIA -- that there were no impunity pacts. Fernandez then quoted Ariel Sharron saying you can't negotiate with terrorists, and that we are partners and brothers on this issue. The Ambassador agreed stating that both countries are fighting the use of terrorism as a political tool and that all nations had a responsibility to fight terror. This was the reason, the Ambassador said, that the issuance of the investigators' report and the Judge's warrants were so important.

Physical Security

¶10. (SBU) Finally, the RSO thanked the Minister for the excellent assistance the Embassy receives from the AFP and PSA in providing assistance for visiting USG officials and Congressional delegations, and the security the AFP provides for the Embassy and Residence.

¶11. (C) Comment: This was a very positive first meeting with Fernandez. His portfolio covers a range of interests important to this Mission, and the Ambassador looks forward to strengthening and building on the good bilateral work underway. The Minister's micromanaging style complicates the working relationship for Embassy agencies somewhat, but is not insurmountable. He is a key political actor -- one of the numerous likely candidates for Buenos Aires governorship in 2007 -- and is interested in showing results (and not making mistakes), so a productive and positive working relationship with the U.S. is in his interests.

WAYNE